



Melissa Hanefine, Charleston Post & Courier

Workers at the Vought Aircraft Industries plant in North Charleston, SC, voted for IAM representation shortly after completing the first aft fuselage of Boeing's 787 Dreamliner, pictured above.

Historic Organizing Win In South Carolina

Organizing the entire workforce at a newly-opened factory is a significant victory no matter where it occurs. Doing it in a state that frequently boasts the lowest unionization rate in the country is a coup of historic proportions.

The Machinists' recent win at Vought Aircraft Industries in North Charleston, South Carolina, made headlines around the country, but workers there who manufacture the aft fuselage of Boeing's 787 Dreamliner, were confident they would prevail.

"The folks at Vought knew the IAM had already negotiat-

ed substantial benefits and wages for aircraft workers at Vought's facility in Nashville, TN and they wanted the same opportunity," said Southern Territory GLR Joe Greaser, who helped guide the Vought campaign from the beginning.

We Knew Our Rights

Despite a blizzard of anti-union propaganda from company representatives and the state's incessant hawking of its low unionization rate, a majority of the assemblers, operators, bonders, quality inspectors, material handlers and maintenance employees at Vought voted for IAM rep-

resentation in an election that was certified by the National Labor Relations Board on November 8, 2007.

"We knew the facts, we knew our rights and we knew the difference between being an at-will employee and having professional representation," said Cindy Ramaker, a Quality Inspector at Vought who welcomed the opportunity to reverse popular misconceptions. "Unions have a proud history in the South that's too often deliberately misrepresented."

South Carolina officials cite their low unionization rate in an effort to lure com-

panies to relocate to the state. "It's a disservice to the workers, the taxpayers and the state itself," said Southern Territory GLR Bobby Sapp. "Advertising low-wage, low-benefit workplaces may be good for corporate profits, but it forces workers and communities to foot the bill."

Forced Overtime

Key issues in the six-month-long campaign at Vought included traditional concerns about wages, benefits and working conditions, but workers also expressed frustration with forced overtime and the company's use of outside contractors.

In an effort to meet stringent deadlines for Boeing's Dreamliner, Vought hired temporary workers to augment the local workforce. Tensions mounted when employees learned that many of the temporary contractors earned nearly double the hourly wage of the Vought employees.

"That wouldn't happen with a union contract that included strong scope protection," said IAM Aerospace Coordinator Ron Eldridge, who will take part in the negotiations for an initial contract for the Vought workforce.

Founded by American aircraft pioneer Chance Vought,

the company initially designed and produced dozens of aircraft, including the legendary gull-winged

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Corsair fighter during WW II. The Dallas-based company today is a prime contractor for the Boeing Company, one of dozens worldwide providing parts for the 787 Dreamliner.

The prospect for a steady supply of work and additional members at Vought's South

Carolina facility is strong. "No one doubts the quality of the work we do here or our commitment to making the best product possible," said Edward Fell, a bonder at Vought who will also serve on the first negotiating committee.

Preparations for initial negotiations and a first contract at Vought are well underway, with elections for shop representatives and a negotiating committee completed and bargaining surveys circulating among employees.

"The IAM has decades of experience negotiating contracts with aerospace companies all across the country," said Southern Territory GVP Bob Martinez. "Our goal will be to make sure aerospace workers in South Carolina have the same opportunity to thrive as aerospace workers in any other state."



Workers at the Vought Aircraft plant in South Carolina elected their first negotiating committee after an organizing victory that sent shock waves through the state's anti-union forces.